

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Dear Admiral:

Responding to your letter of September 25th, I want to let you know that the recommendations of the Board and the more detailed comments of the Science Panel on COINS are very helpful to me, particularly at this time when I recognize the need to develop my personal focus on this complex subject. I am aware of the Board's hope that a successful effort by the intelligence community in the COINS area may serve as a model for use elsewhere in the Government.

I agree with the Panel that our technical progress and planning must be placed in a larger managerial context for the entire community. I also share your view that we must move purposefully to delineate a community-wide concept and objectives, an agreed community plan of implementation, and an effective overall management structure. (1)

As your letter points out, given the complexity of these matters, these tasks must be performed under my direct guidance. This is necessary, also, because of the potentially large resource requirements that could be involved over the next several years. Difficult judgments involving trade-offs may be required, and I must make them in the context of the total national intelligence program, aided by advice from IRAC.

The initial plan that I am now setting in motion includes setting up a COINS Assessment Group. This will be a small, high-level body, to advise me rather promptly on the concepts that should guide our further efforts. I want this group to help me to establish my own focus, and to provide some basic yardsticks for us all relative to objectives, possible costs, and cost effectiveness. Among others, this group will include Dr. Hall's representative as well as the newly-appointed replacement for General Robert Taylor as Acting Chairman of the USIB Intelligence Information Handling Committee. The group will include advisors who can speak to questions of technology and of intelligence substance. I also have in mind your suggestion as to consultants, and I am considering further whether they might be most useful to me as part of the Assessment Group or working directly with my Office.

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There are areas where we can make immediate progress. We are improving files now in COINS and working to set standards for those that are placed in the system in the relatively near future. Some of these specific initiatives are along the following lines:

-- File content and coverage. I am now working out a procedure to involve substantive USIB committees, working with the USIB Intelligence Information Handling Committee (IHC), in validating community needs for particular kinds of data and providing guidance on the content, coverage and format of files. For example, if COINS were to include a new file on the subject of nuclear energy, JAEIC should be involved in providing insights on behalf of potential users. The Intelligence Community (IC) Staff also has a responsibility in the matter of file content.

-- File completeness. A survey is now underway by the IC Staff to illustrate and characterize the security and dissemination restrictions that must be dealt with to make data in COINS files more complete and accessible throughout the community. Based on the results of this survey, which I expect to have in hand this month, we will begin an orderly re-examination of this problem.

-- User assistance. I am asking that the inter-agency Data Base Working Group make, as a regular part of its survey of files for COINS, an examination of the adequacy of cross-reference notations and user instructions contained in the files. Where worthwhile improvements can be made, taking account, however, of the prospective benefit as compared with the cost of rewriting computer programs, we will take the necessary action.

-- File reliability. I expect to share with USIB members the results of the work of the COINS Assessment Group. At that time, I will involve them in working out acceptable arrangements to share responsibilities for producing and maintaining certain COINS files and for assuring their accuracy and completeness. This will require us to make further hard judgments on the relative costs and benefits of existing and proposed files.

-- Analytical content. The IC Staff is now testing, for use in crisis and warning situations, the rapid exchange of current intelligence in a national operations and intelligence watch officers network running among the Washington area command centers. This project provides a test vehicle to gain practical experience with the use of intelligence materials that can be formatted and presented in an orderly way, thus enhancing the possibility for computer assistance to intelligence analysts. This experience can benefit files developed for COINS.

I intend to take advantage of the November 5th meeting of the Intelligence Resources Advisory Committee to discuss your letter and my response. I want to take account of the actions that  has taken over the past several months, and he will be reporting on COINS at this meeting.

As we move ahead this fall with the steps I have mentioned above, I will ensure that the President's Board and its Staff are in close contact with our ongoing activities.

W. E. Colby

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